

# The Basics of Jazz Piano

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Phil Dunlap  
Director of Education and Community Engagement  
Jazz St. Louis  
[phil@jazzstl.org](mailto:phil@jazzstl.org)



## 2.4

# SCALES

**MAJOR**  $C^{MAJ7}$

**DOMINANT**  $C^7$

**MINOR (DORIAN)**  $C^{MIN7}$

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THESE SCALES ARE IN THE 3RDS AND 7THS. ALL OTHER NOTES ARE THE SAME.

BECAUSE OF THIS, THE 3RDS AND 7THS OF ANY SCALE ARE VERY IMPORTANT!

# CHORDS

BY STARTING ON THE ROOT (1ST NOTE) OF THE SCALE, AND PLAYING EVERY OTHER NOTE, YOU GET A CHORD. EVERY TYPE OF CHORD YOU ENCOUNTER WILL BE SOME FORM OF MAJOR, MINOR OR DOMINANT CHORD, SO LEARNING THESE ARE ESSENTIAL!

$C^{MAJ7}$   $C^7$   $C^{MIN7}$

1 3 5 7    1 3 5 b7    1 b3 5 b7

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## SCALES

CMAJ7 C7 CMIN7  
 FMAJ7 F7 FMIN7  
 B<sup>b</sup>MAJ7 B<sup>b</sup>7 B<sup>b</sup>MIN7  
 E<sup>b</sup>MAJ7 E<sup>b</sup>7 E<sup>b</sup>MIN7  
 A<sup>b</sup>MAJ7 A<sup>b</sup>7 A<sup>b</sup>MIN7  
 D<sup>b</sup>MAJ7 D<sup>b</sup>7 D<sup>b</sup>MIN7  
 G<sup>b</sup>MAJ7 G<sup>b</sup>7 G<sup>b</sup>MIN7  
 F<sup>#</sup>MAJ7 F<sup>#</sup>7 F<sup>#</sup>MIN7  
 BMAJ7 B7 BMIN7  
 EMAJ7 E7 EMIN7  
 AMAJ7 A7 AMIN7  
 DMAJ7 D7 DMIN7  
 GMAJ7 G7 GMIN7

2.6

# CHORDS

The chart displays 12 rows of chord voicings, each with three measures. The chords and their corresponding notes and fingerings are as follows:

Staff	Chord	Notes	Fingerings
1	C <sup>MAJ</sup> 7	C4, E4, G4, Bb4	1, 3, 5, 7
1	C <sup>7</sup>	C4, E4, G4, Bb4	1, 3, 5, b7
1	C <sup>MIN</sup> 7	C4, Eb4, G4, Bb4	1, b3, 5, b7
2	F <sup>MAJ</sup> 7	F4, A4, C5, Eb5	
2	F <sup>7</sup>	F4, A4, C5, Eb5	
2	F <sup>MIN</sup> 7	F4, Ab4, C5, Eb5	
3	B <sup>b</sup> MAJ7	Bb4, D5, F5, Ab5	
3	B <sup>b</sup> 7	Bb4, D5, F5, Ab5	
3	B <sup>b</sup> MIN7	Bb4, Db5, F5, Ab5	
4	E <sup>b</sup> MAJ7	Eb4, G4, Bb4, D5	
4	E <sup>b</sup> 7	Eb4, G4, Bb4, D5	
4	E <sup>b</sup> MIN7	Eb4, Gb4, Bb4, D5	
5	A <sup>b</sup> MAJ7	Ab4, C5, Eb5, G5	
5	A <sup>b</sup> 7	Ab4, C5, Eb5, G5	
5	A <sup>b</sup> MIN7	Ab4, Cb5, Eb5, G5	
6	D <sup>b</sup> MAJ7	Db4, F4, Ab4, C5	
6	D <sup>b</sup> 7	Db4, F4, Ab4, C5	
6	D <sup>b</sup> MIN7	Db4, Fb4, Ab4, C5	
7	G <sup>b</sup> MAJ7	Gb4, Bb4, Db5, F5	
7	G <sup>b</sup> 7	Gb4, Bb4, Db5, F5	
7	G <sup>b</sup> MIN7	Gb4, Bbb4, Db5, F5	
8	F <sup>#</sup> MAJ7	F#4, A#4, C#5, Eb5	
8	F <sup>#</sup> 7	F#4, A#4, C#5, Eb5	
8	F <sup>#</sup> MIN7	F#4, Ab4, C#5, Eb5	
9	BMAJ7	B4, D5, F5, Ab5	
9	B7	B4, D5, F5, Ab5	
9	BMIN7	B4, Db5, F5, Ab5	
10	EMAJ7	E4, G4, B4, D5	
10	E7	E4, G4, B4, D5	
10	EMIN7	E4, Gb4, B4, D5	
11	AMAJ7	A4, C5, Eb5, G5	
11	A7	A4, C5, Eb5, G5	
11	AMIN7	A4, Cb5, Eb5, G5	
12	DMAJ7	D4, F4, Ab4, C5	
12	D7	D4, F4, Ab4, C5	
12	DMIN7	D4, Fb4, Ab4, C5	
13	GMAJ7	G4, B4, Db5, F5	
13	G7	G4, B4, Db5, F5	
13	GMIN7	G4, Bbb4, Db5, F5	

### 3.0 General Rules for Chord Voicing

The piano component of JazzU will require you to play some basic chords on the piano, which means that you'll have to familiarize yourself with some fundamental aspects of chords and chord voicing. There is a separate requirement for pianists and non-pianists, so if you're new at this, don't worry. In this section, we'll outline some basics of chords and chord construction, followed by chord voicing for non-pianists and then chord voicing for pianists.

#### Understanding Chord Symbols

In jazz, you're most likely to encounter chord symbols, rather than written-out chords. Depending on who wrote the symbols, the same chord will often be written differently. The good thing is that you'll only be dealing with three different types of chords: Major, Minor and Dominant. Here are the most common ways you will see these chords written:

**Major -**

$C_{MAJ}7$        $CM7$        $C\Delta$

**Minor -**

$C_{MIN}7$        $Cm7$        $C-7$

**Dominant -**

$C7$

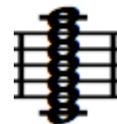
#### Picking the Right Notes

So, you are looking at the chord symbol and you know what the chord is, but how do you know what notes to play? Chords and chord voicings can be easily derived from the major scale (see section 2.4). First, think of the C major scale and ask yourself, "how many different notes are in this scale?" The answer is seven, right? Now ask yourself, "when I play chords, and when I outline chords (see section 2.4), what interval do I use?" The answer is the interval of a third, right?

Is there a way to arrange all of the notes of the C major scale in thirds? The answer is, yes! The diagram below shows you all of the possible notes in each chord and that there are actually seven notes to choose from.



Can be written as:



Now, I may have just confused some of you and, for others, I might have just blown your mind. With seven notes in each chord, how do you pick the right ones? Well, we are actually only really going to be dealing with three of those notes, and they will be the same for each chord, but with some very small variations.

If you go back and look at our scales (section 2.5) and chords (section 2.6), you will notice that there are three variations, which are the same three I mention above, major, minor and dominant. The only things that change between the three iterations are the 3rd and 7th. All other notes remain the same. This tells us that the 3rds and 7ths are the most important notes of each chord. These two notes are important because they help us determine the **quality** (major or minor) and **function** (pre dominant, dominant or tonic) of a chord. The root is also important, as it tells us the name of the chord.

Below, you will see that each of the three variations I've mentioned can all be derived from the major scale. What is the moral of the story? Know your major scales, and you'll have no problem figuring out the rest! Whether you are playing chords on the piano, spelling them on your saxophone or playing scales, the following will always be true:

**Major chords:** regular 3rd, regular 7th (all the notes of the corresponding major scale)

**Dominant chords:** regular 3rd, flatted 7th

**Minor chords:** flatted 3rd, flatted 7th



So, of all the notes available to you, the ones we are going to focus on are the root, the 3rd and the 7th. What about all of the other notes? Since none of the other notes don't have the ability to change the **quality** or **function** of the chord, they are there solely to add color and texture.

**note:** the following sections will outline chord voicing for both pianists and non pianists. Non pianists will only be responsible for playing the root, 3rds and 7ths of chords.

### 3.1 Chord Voicing for Non Pianists

For everyone participating in the JazzU program, there is a piano requirement. Learning piano is integral to understanding harmony, improvisation and your own instrument. We realize that not everyone has had experience playing the piano, so for non-pianists, the requirement is fairly simple. You will, however, have to spend some time at a piano or keyboard. If you don't have one, you can find one at your school, church or even library. I bet one of your family members has one you can use.

As you know from section 3.0, General Rules for Chord Voicing, the most important notes of a chord are the 3rd and 7th. Therefore, all you will need to play is the 3rd and 7th of each chord in the right hand, and the root of the chord in the left hand. See the example below for how to play a C major 7, C dominant 7, and a c minor 7.



If you are just playing one chord, it doesn't matter which note of the right hand you play first. You can either make the 3rd or the 7th the lowest note. However, when you practice playing a blues or standard, you'll need to pay attention to a little thing called **voice leading**. The term **voice leading** refers to how notes of a chord lead to notes in the next chord. In general, the 3rd of one chord will lead to the 7th of another chord. Likewise, the 7th of one chord will lead to the 3rd of the next chord. See the two examples below. The first is using correct voice leading, the second does not. Notice that in the example using correct voice leading, there is very minimal movement from one chord to the next. In the example using incorrect voice leading, the chords jump around.

#### Correct Voice Leading:



#### Incorrect Voice Leading:



Remember, always practice with a steady beat. Also, feel free to do more than only what is required. If you want to get the hang of playing chords on the piano, try to learn some of the other standards you are playing in your JazzU combo. It'll only help you understand your other tunes better!

## 3.2 Chord Voicing for Pianists

This section is to help young piano players navigate the tricky waters of voicing chords. We'll start with the same basic ideas covered in the previous two sections and then add from there.

Every chord contains a root, 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th, 11th and 13th. You can see these notes by taking all of the notes of a major scale and arranging them in 3rds. We call this a **super-triad**.



The above diagrams represent all of the possible notes. Since the ii-V-I is one of the most important chord progressions, we've decided to use it as we continue our discussion. Here are some general rules to help you with basic chord voicing.

1. Avoid the root. Because the bass player is generally going to be playing the root, you'll want to avoid using it. Sometimes, you may want to put the root in the top voice, but definitely avoid making it your lowest note. If you're playing solo piano, then use the root. Minor ii-v-i voicing is different, and the root is used.
2. When voicing a major ii-V-I, always start with the 3rd and 7th of the chord in your left hand. You can invert them if you want, but pay attention, because the order you choose determines what comes next.
3. To figure out the notes to put in your right hand, first add the next chord tone above your highest note, then add the next chord tone up from your lowest note. Your voicings will either be 3-7-9-5 or 7-3-5-9.
4. On dominant chords, use 13 instead of 5....why? It just sounds better.
5. Extensions are there to add color. On major and dominant chords, you will need to sharpen the 11th scale degree to avoid clashing tones (play it and you'll hear the dissonance). The other extensions are 9 (can be sharpened or flatted) and 13 (can be flatted) and can be altered as long as the alteration does not interfere with the function or quality of the chord.
6. Be conscious of voice leading, meaning that there is as little movement (jumping around the keyboard) as possible from one chord to the next. Also, notice how the 3rd of one chord, leads to the 7th of the next chord. Keep your chords in the mid-range of the piano. Don't get too high or low.

### Voicing a Major ii-V-I



### Voicing a minor ii-v-i

The minor ii-v-i is a completely different animal. The principal is the same as its major counterpart, but there are some variations. Pay attention to the scale degrees used as we use the root in the minor ii chord. These voicings can be inverted.

